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ABSTRACT

At Syracuse University (New York), Writing 205 offers students an introduction to the principles of rhetoric and the concept of disciplinary discourse. The study of landscape and place serves as a conduit for students to explore design, intention, and audience--a rhetoric of place--in order to develop a comprehension which is then easily transferred to texts. The course is divided into two sections: (1) the rhetoric of place, and (2) the place of rhetoric. The first section is subdivided into three 2-week units, each focusing on a different aspect of place. In the first unit, students are introduced to concepts of rhetoric and the tools of persuasion. The second unit focuses on textual landscapes--written representations of landscape. The third unit moves from personal to public places and moves students, literally, out of the classroom to consider the intentions behind the design of all sorts of public buildings, both in terms of what they say about their functional purposes and how they affect the people who use them. The second section is driven by the students' own research into the rhetorical formation of different discourse communities, in a project investigating the discourse of a specific community. (CR)

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The Rhetoric of Place

At Syracuse University, undergraduates are required to take a sequence of two composition courses in their freshman and sophomore years. Writing 105 introduces students to process-oriented writing practices and various forms of critical and reflective writing. Writing 205, the course which is the focus of my discussion, offers students an introduction to the principles of rhetoric and the concept of disciplinary discourse. For the latter, I mean an understanding of how the writing produces within and for specific academic and professional disciplines is governed by discursive rules which require particular kinds of knowledge and language. Consider the difference between, say, the requirements of legal writing and those for fashion marketing as a way of imagining what I mean by discourse.

Writing 205 can be quite a difficult course for students to handle since it challenges their preconceptions of writing as a solitary, individual act in which the writer makes up the rules as he or she goes along. These students don't recognize the differences in writing between the disciplines. Even those students who do recognize the differences exist between discourse communities often find often find the analysis of rhetorical structures extremely difficult because they don't know what to look for, or what to make of what they find. I have tried (and I think successfully) to address some of these difficulties by brining into my classroom practices fro cultural

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geography—the analysis of landscape and place— as a way to introduce students to disciplinary rhetoric in a sideways fashion. Generally, I have found that students come to the classroom with a strong sense of place. Differences between man-made landscapes are easily recognizable to them. The study of landscape and place serves as a conduit for students to explore design, intention, and audience—a rhetoric of place—in order to develop a comprehension which is then easily transferred to texts. Place is the hinge around which my class turn: students learn the rhetoric of place in order to better find their "place" in rhetoric.

Before I describe the course I've designed in more detail, I should explain my own interest in geography and how I came to bring it into my composition classroom. My work as a doctoral student centers on the interpretation of landscape in literature. I have come to learn that landscape representations can be read as signifiers of cultural beliefs and desires, and of political contest and ideological critique. Landscape often signifies idealized forms of social and political organization, real or imagined, such as Jefferson's agrarian democracy. Landscape can be used to critique ideologies or economic practices, as in Harriet Beecher Stowe's degraded and debauched South of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Idealized pastoral or wilderness backdrops are frequently used in the service of advertising consumer products, ranging from beer to breakfast cereal to 4x4 pickup trucks, as a way to "naturalize" their place in consumer culture, investing them with cultural myth, or to demonstrate their moral purity.

Recent work in the field of cultural geography has proven very useful for my research in the way that it has redefined the very definition and meaning of landscape. Denis Cosgrove, a geographer at the University of London, describes landscape as a "way of seeing," a discourse which shapes

how we define and evaluate land aesthetically and ideologically. The landscape way of seeing emerged simultaneously, and is inextricably linked, with early capitalism and privatization of common lands. Cosgrove's thesis insists that the very concept of landscape—distant land forms viewed by an a single viewpoint subject, a familiar view typified by landscape gardens and genre paintings—presumes the existence of private property and capitalistic social formation[1]. Thus, landscape can be a vehicle for analyzing economic organization. James Duncan, a Canadian geographer now at Cambridge University, applies post-structural and post-colonial theories to landscape interpretation. Starting with the work itself (geo + graphy = world writing), Duncan argues that the ways we know and understand landscapes are necessarily overdetermined by powerful discursive structures. Thus, geographical writing (and, by extension, any representation of the land) is not mimetic of the world as-it-is, but a view of the world filtered through political, institutional, economic, and psychological desires[2]. For Duncan, all landscape are cultural productions that can as texts which contain all of the regulatory and political powers of "discourse" in the Foucaultian sense. Donald Meinig, a geographer at Syracuse University, puts the interpretation quite simply: "any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes, but what lies within our heads."[3] And what lies within our heads is discourse and the rules of disciplinarity.

As a teaching scholar, I am interested in brining my own work and research to bear on my classroom. It helps make my teaching more relevant to myself, and it helps to make the problems of disciplinary rhetoric (which to

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[1] Cosgrove, Denis. Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape. Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1984.

[2] Barnes, Trevor and James S. Duncan. Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text & Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape. New York: Routledge, 1993.

[3] Meinig, D. W. Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes. New York: Oxford U.P., 1979.

my students can be fairly tedious stuff) more interesting and accessible to them. This is especially the case for sophomores, who may not have yet selected an academic major or decided on a professional career path, for who the need for grasping disciplinary rhetoric may not have yet touched their lives. Reading and analyzing landscapes gives students something recognizable that does touch their lives, and overall, analyzing the rhetoric of landscape gives students a non-threatening and fun way into the principles of rhetoric and theories of discourse.

My course is dividend into two section: 1) the rhetoric of place, and 2) the place of rhetoric. The first section, which covers the first half of the semester, is divided into three two-week units, each focusing on a different aspect of the use of place. At the end of each unit, students write a 3-4 page "working paper" addressing the issues discussed. At the end of the section students revise one of the working papers into a full-length essay of 6-8 pages. This system has the advantage of giving students three possible paper drafts to revise for their final assignment (so they can't complain about having nothing to write about), and they may use the concepts learned in the process of writing the other two working papers in the revision of their final essay.

In the first unit, called "Selling Place," I introduce students to concepts of rhetoric and the tools of persuasion, calling students' attentions to the way advertisers use landscapes to create ethos and pathos for the purpose of selling products. This unit gives me the chance to use non-tradition texts (TV and magazine advertising) as a way to investigate ethos, as well as critical/theoretical texts that teach students how to deconstruct the ads we read. We look at the way landscapes signify everything from "traditional" values (family farms, picket fences, the Rocky Mountains with bald eagles in flight), to sexuality (curvaceous rocks, wave-swept beaches), to individual and

personal freedom (a single boat on a misty lake, a truck pummeling rugged desert terrain). I ask students to consider what particular landscapes tell us about the products; about the values advertisers want us to associate with them; about what it says about the audiences for whom these ads are targeted.

The second unit focuses on textual landscapes—written representations of landscape. Here I get to employ a variety of texts, including non-fiction prose, nature writing, fiction, and poetry. This is where I focus on helping students develop their close reading skills. Beginning with Barry Lopez's essay, "Mapping the Real Geography," I ask students to consider what makes places important, not only to themselves, but to larger communities as well.[4] From there we look at texts by authors, such as Thoreau, Kerouac, LeGuin, and Silko, to consider how writers convey both the feel and the importance of place—the whole sense of place—through language alone. Here, we focus on identifying and analyzing key words, figurative language, syntax and sentence length, in order to discern how place is rhetorically constructed. The assignment for this unit asks students to do two things: to write their own "real geography" of a place they know well, and to analyze the rhetorical strategies they used in constructing that place.

The third unit moves from personal to public places and moves us, literally, out of the classroom. If representations of place have a rhetoric, so too do constructed public places. I ask students to consider the intentions behind the design of all sorts of public buildings. I start with the university itself. At that time I happened to be teaching in the building housing the Writing Program offices, Huntington Beard Crouse Hall, or HBC for short. HBC is a very "functional" building, constructed most likely in the late fifties

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[4] Lopez, Barry. "Mapping the Real Geography" in Linda Simon, ed. Contexts: A Thematic Reader. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.

or early sixties. Imagine a squat, flat, shoebox-shaped, red brick building with few distinct architectural features (although there is a Ben Shawn mosaic on one outside wall depicting the Sacco and Vanzetti trial, which I assume to be an afterthought). The interior structure was designed to be modified at will, with walls that are clearly meant to be removable. All the classrooms are box-like and windowless. The air that circulates through the building, just like the students that circulate through the building, is forced and conditioned. One can read this building as a metaphor for an educational philosophy which attempts to initiate students into the deadening institutional patterns which will regulate their lives. Next to HBC is the Hall of Languages, or HL, a building nearly one hundred years older than HBC. HL is a five-story, granite block structure in a late French empire style, with soaring towers and mansard roofs. The upward motion of the building's design speaks of higher knowledge, and of learning as a privileged pursuit for a privileged class.

I ask my students to consider the designs of public places both in terms of what they say about their functional purposes and how they affect the people who use them. Our "texts" are wide-ranging. Syracuse University is fortunate to be located to a nineteenth century "rural" cemetery designed by a prominent landscape architect. The cemetery, which is still in use, contains numerous funerary structures, Moselea in gothic, classical, and Egyptian styles. There is even a large pyramid with a cross on top. Tombstones range from highly ornate structures with angels and draped urns from the Victorian period, to plain granite slabs of the 20th century, with nothing more than names and dates. I take my students on walking tours of the cemetery and ask them to consider what the different tombstone designs—even the lay of the land itself (it's very picturesque)—suggest about changing attitudes toward death, the social status of the deceased, or even what it means that

such a large piece of land is dedicated to this purpose. I also ask students to take excursions on their own to public places such a sparks, government buildings, and shopping malls. Our critical texts include Foucault's "Panopticism," from *Discipline and Punish*, which theorizes how space and surveillance are manipulated in the service of social control, and essays on shopping mall design, which investigates how architectural structure is shaped to create fantasy interior worlds with the specific purpose of compelling people to shop.[5] Students then produce a working paper which describes a public space and analyzes how the public which uses it are manipulated into responding in particular ways.

These three units, all focusing on variations of landscape, give students the means of interpreting places for their power to motivate response. The premise behind these assignments is that all places has a rhetoric to it (even "natural" places, like wilderness—the rhetoric lies in our conditioned responses to nature, for which we are trained through the power of discourse). The effective reading of place requires an effective understanding of rhetoric. Such an understanding allows students to comprehend why they respond to the texts they respond to, and empowers them to short-circuit the processes of naturalization central to advertising and political discourse.

the second section of my course, in the last half of the semester, is driven by the students' own research into the rhetorical formation of different discourse communities. That is, once students have a grasp of the idea of rhetoric they are prepared to consider how rhetoric is shaped by the discursive requirements of disciplinary communities. Students are asked to research the writings within a specific academic or profession discipline of their choice with the purpose of identifying and analyzing the rules and

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[5] Foucault, Michel. Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison. New York: Vintage, 1979.

limitations that govern communication within that discipline. the purpose here is two-fold: to help students recognize the adjustments they'll need to make in their writing as they begin to enter a professional discourse community; and to grasp intellectually what those rules and limitations might mean in terms of defining legitimacy, authority, and power within that discipline (and perhaps to begin to question those rules). To this effect, I assign Foucault's essay, "The Order of Discourse," to help the class define disciplinary language within the framework of power.[6] But not before reading James Porter's essay, "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community."[7] Not only does Porter introduce students to the idea that an individual's writing is shaped by the rules of discourse, it also serves as a model of a text written for a particular discourse community. I ask students to contrast Porter's essay (written for teaching professionals) to the introductory essay of the textbook, *Communities of Discourse,* which outlines similar concepts, but in accordance with the requirements of a very different audience (college undergraduates).[8]

Unlike the first section, in which students write short working papers which could be revised into a full-length essay, this section engages students in a sustained research project, in which they investigate the discourse of a specific community. As they move through their projects, I require that my students submit what are effectively progress reports, which allow me to monitor their work, not only so that they stay on track with the assignment,

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[6] Foucault, Michel. The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Order of Discourse. New York: Pantheon, 1972.
[7] Porter, James. "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community." Rhetoric Review 5:1 (Fall 1986) 34-47.
[8] Schmidt, Gary and William J. Vande Kupple, Communities of Discourse: The Rhetoric of Disciplines. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1993.

but so that I can coach them in their line of inquiry. The are given three options for their final assignments:

1) a short, five-page essay written in the language of their discourse community, followed by a 2-3 page rhetorical analysis describing how the paper follows the rules of that discourse community

2) a contrastive analysis of how two different discourse communities address a similar issue

3) an analysis of how a discourse community might address two different audiences on the same topic

Throughout this second section, rhetorical analysis is modeled for the students. In keeping with the course's topic of inquiry, I ask students to read and analyze different kinds of descriptions of the same place written through different discourse over a long period of time. Students read descriptions of Niagara Falls written over a period of 300 years, from the perspective of exploration, natural history, tourism, and engineering. I ask the students to consider what professional concerns and disciplinary purposes shape the language of these descriptions. Why, for instance, would an explorer describe the falls in terms of the difficulty of passage, a tour guide describe them in terms of beauty and health, and an engineer describe them in terms of horsepower and tonnage of coal? Students also read two essays by Steven Jay Gould to consider the moves the same writer must make when addressing different discourse communities—one, the readers of *Natural History*, the other, scientists attending a conference of the National Academy of Sciences.

Through this kind of modeling, students become familiar with ways of reading that focuses attention of the rhetorical structures and discursive requirements of different discourse communities. This way of reading not only makes students more adept at controlling their own writing, tailoring it

to the rhetorical needs of the moment, it puts them on the path of recognizing how power and authority are produced and maintained discursively. My goal is not for my students to enter the discourse of their professions simply and seamlessly, but for them to recognize the strategies of exclusions by which professional communities maintain themselves. And perhaps, to question why some knowledges and languages are legitimated while others aren't, and to consider what's at stake for themselves and others as they struggle to make their places in rhetoric and discourse.